

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPING A CORRIDOR THEME

4.1 Context Sensitive Solutions and Aesthetics

Aesthetics are considered in the highway project planning and design process. The development of transportation design elements should be responsive to local values and concerns. The various elements need to provide corridor consistency while enhancing individual community identity.

Improving the appearance and image of the corridor is a primary goal of the Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan. Caltrans will be responsible for design features and landscaping within the Route 99 right-of-way, while local agencies will be responsible for standards in the viewshed beyond the right-of-way, which has an influence on the perception of the community and travelers. Aesthetics are considered in the highway project planning and design process. The development of transportation design elements should be responsive to local values and concerns. The various elements need to provide corridor consistency while enhancing individual community identity.

This is accomplished by what Caltrans refers to as “Context Sensitive Solutions.” It applies “innovative and inclusive approaches that integrate and balance community, aesthetic, historic, and environmental values with transportation safety, maintenance and performance goals.” Context sensitive solutions are reached “through a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach involving all stakeholders.” An emphasis should be placed on improving the boundary between the transportation corridor and the communities and people next to the highway. According to the Project Development Procedures Manual: “A reasonable additional expenditure is justified to aesthetically enhance transportation projects.” (PDPM Chapter 29, Part 3, Section 5 - Aesthetics)

Typically, urban portions of Route 99 are landscaped and rural portions are not. Rural areas will, for the most part, make the most of the valley’s natural beauty, the changing of season, the natural vistas, and the rich farmland. The Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Project Development Team, along with the Route 99 Task Force from the Great Valley Center, recommended that consistency and unity in the appearance and image of the Route 99 Corridor can be enhanced through the application of a Corridor Theme. Section 4.2 describes what this corridor theme is, how it was developed, who was involved in the theme development, as well as ideas on how it may be implemented by Caltrans and local agencies alike.

4.2 Developing the Corridor Theme

In collaboration with select members of the Route 99 Task Force of the Great Valley Center, Caltrans facilitated the task of establishing a theme for the Route 99 Corridor. The Task Force members represented local agencies from Kern County in the south through San Joaquin County in the north, along with various Caltrans functional representatives and the Great Valley Center.

It was an iterative process where the group first met in November/December of 2003. Initial comments at these meetings were solicited through a “Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master



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Plan Theme Concept Survey.” The group members were encouraged to write down elements along the corridor that would represent it in a positive manner, and then to write down a phrase that encompassed those elements. Examples of initial theme comment groupings were: Mainstreet, Agriculture, Valleyscapes and Valley Heritage.

From these theme comment groupings, Caltrans then conducted another survey where the members were asked to vote on

their favorite components of the theme, consisting of the Route 99 identifier, a title for Route 99, and a catch phrase. Out of an array of themes considered, the one validated by all members of the Route 99 Task Force in January 2004 was “Route 99-The Mainstreet of California’s Heartland-linking heritage to innovation.”

The theme is advisory; however it will aid in establishing unified and aesthetically pleasing design features. Local agencies could integrate the theme outside the right-of-way to further theme continuity. The theme can be advanced and strengthened by the careful selection of enhancement treatments. Section 4.3 outlines Caltrans’ responsibilities and authority upon imple-

mentation of the Route 99 Corridor Theme. It also includes suggested local agency responsibilities and authority that could complement and enhance the Caltrans efforts.

4.3 Roles and Responsibilities for Corridor Theme Coordination—State and Local

*Suggested Corridor Theme:
Route 99-The Mainstreet of California’s Heartland-
linking heritage to innovation*

4.3.1 State Involvement

Caltrans has lead responsibility for design of the State highway roadside, the Caltrans Landscape Architecture seeks to “balance mobility needs with local community values, adjacent land use, and scenic, cultural, historic and environmental resources.” Traveler and worker safety are two other high priorities. The landscape architects also provide design expertise to protect and improve aesthetic resources along the State highway. They are also charged with including aesthetic features in a project and integrating transportation improvements into the surroundings, including special treatment for bridges, median barriers, walls, and pavement.



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Caltrans will facilitate the integration of the Route 99 Corridor Theme into future project improvements on Route 99. The Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan Advisory Committee will advise Caltrans regarding the appropriate application of the theme for project implementation. Caltrans has authority only within the Route 99 right-of-way, but has only an advisory role on adjoining local jurisdiction aesthetic issues. In working on Corridor Theme implementation, Caltrans or the Advisory Committee will work with the local County or City Beautification Committee, construction contractors, city council members or county supervisors, or other entity given aesthetic treatment responsibility.

Below are illustrations of potential signs that could depict the Corridor Theme on Route 99.



The Caltrans landscape architects are involved with the following highway aesthetic programs, as indicated in the Caltrans Project Development Procedures Manual:

- HIGHWAY PLANTING:** Chapter 29, Section 2-Landscape Architecture of the Project Development Procedures Manual. Policy: The Department does planting on State highways where safety and environmental requirements dictate, along with providing visual aesthetic integration of the facility within the existing environs. Highway planting consists of new highway planting, replacement highway planting, highway planting restoration, highway planting revegetation, required mitigation planting, and irrigation system upgrade work.
- TRANSPORTATION ART:** Chapter 29, Section 6-Landscape Architecture of the Project Development Procedures Manual. Policy: The Department will encourage and promote enrichment of the cultural and visual environment for transportation system users and local communities by facilitating and coordinating the placement of artwork by others, within the State highway right-of-way, through the encroachment permit process.
- COMMUNITY IDENTIFICATION:** Chapter 29, Section 8-Landscape Architecture of Project Development Procedures Manual. Policy: The Department will encourage and promote enrichment of the cultural and visual environment for transportation system users and local communities by using a collaborative approach to facilitate and coordinate the integration of community



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identification within the State highway right-of-way. Community identification is defined as images or text that conveys information about a region, community or area. A Community Identifier is handled through the encroachment permit process.

- **GATEWAY MONUMENTS:** Chapter 29, Section 9-Landscape Architecture of Project Development Procedures Manual. Policy: The Department is authorized to approve gateway monuments for installation within State rights of way. The duration of the Gateway Monument demonstration program will be for a period of four years, from January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2008. The Department may discontinue the demonstration program at any time prior to the termination date. The Department will accept preliminary Gateway Monument proposals only during the first two years of the demonstration program, until December 21, 2006. Proposals for the placement of the Gateway Monuments will not be accepted after December 31, 2006. A gateway monument is defined as any freestanding structure or sign, not integral to highway facilities, that communicates the name of a region, community or area. A Gateway Monument is authorized through the encroachment permit process.

4.3.2 Local Involvement

While the State has jurisdiction over the Route 99 highway right-of-way, the local jurisdictions (city, county or other public jurisdiction) have control over the use and appearance of the land adjacent to Route 99 (or outside of the right-of-way). Land use regulations, development standards, sig-

nage regulations, and incentives/educational means to improve vistas and viewsheds, are primary measures to attain better compatibility with the Route 99 theme. Following are examples, but not an inclusive list, of each of these measures, many of which are extracted from the Route 99 Corridor Improvement Guide, prepared by the Highway 99 Task Force of the Great Valley Center.

LAND USE REGULATIONS

A county or city has statutory powers to develop a General Plan that would lay the blueprint for the types and densities of land uses for the future, usually for 20-25 years. The General Plan establishes the local vision for the land use along Route 99, whether for an intense urban corridor, a scenic landscape or mixed uses. Tools in a General Plan to control land use compatibility and to achieve thematic integrity along Route 99 are:

- **ZONING**-This indicates the type(s) of land uses that are permissible in specific areas or zones. A community can create a scenic corridor along Route 99, thereby preserving and providing a more pleasant driving experience, or it can allow only land uses deemed compatible along a highway. Zoning laws can limit the height of buildings. Overlay zoning places additional restrictions on zoned areas and is often used to control density, grading, ridgeline development and vegetation. View corridors are planned openings in the built environment that allow views of scenic vistas.
- **LAND PURCHASE**-Among the more expensive options, land



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purchase is sometimes the only way to protect scenic vistas and viewsheds permanently from development. A land trust uses funds to purchase threatened land for the benefit of the public.

- **TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (TDR)**- This is an alternative strategy to purchasing land. TDRs preserve scenic areas by transferring, or “sending,” development rights from sensitive lands to “receiving” areas marked for growth.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Whether development is existing or new construction is pending, the local jurisdiction can control or mitigate how the development will look and interface with Route 99. The following are examples of how this may be done:

- If existing buildings do not fit in with the corridor, a planting program may be instituted or soundwalls may be built if noise is a problem. Landscaping and public art on or along the wall would benefit the corridor.
- For new building construction, a design review board could rule on design guidelines such as height, size, architectural style, color, siting and more. The building design and placement can attenuate noise from Route 99 and can create a more interesting appearance from the highway.
- Buildings, new or old, could use noise attenuation material.

SIGN AND BILLBOARD REGULATIONS

The local jurisdiction can control existing signage along Route 99, as well as influence what new signage occurs, in several ways. First, fees can be established for new or existing signs, which would cover the jurisdiction cost of controlling them (i.e., billboards) and/or affect the profitability of these signs. Second, the standards of the signs could be raised, which would limit aspects of signage (i.e., animated, revolving, large size). Alternative smaller, less obtrusive signs might be more attractive. Finally, the prohibition of signage, notably billboards, may be needed to reduce billboards in the community.

To ensure the protection and management of scenic vistas and viewsheds from Route 99, the local jurisdiction can conduct a visual assessment of the assets and liabilities that a community has to offer. This is done to identify what is at risk in the community, as well as to manage growth. Following the visual assessment, the citizens can be educated on the importance of scenic vistas and viewsheds to the community’s quality of life.

Chapter 5 covers how Caltrans can implement the Corridor Theme via the highway aesthetic programs with local jurisdictions.

